

Editorial Notes

Over the years, *Comparative Studies of Public Administration* has published much on subjects of notable significance in public administration, primarily for the benefit of the EROPA members and affiliates. Past volumes have served to facilitate various theoretical as well as practical discourses by bringing together contributors from different countries on a single selected issue of importance. The current issue marks the sixth edition of the studies. As it did in the past, in 1997, the Local Autonomy College of Japan organized an editorial committee to discuss and then choose the topic for the forthcoming issue. The committee included Professors Hiromi Muto of Hosei University and Ryuji Obara of Seikei University, in addition to several staff members from the Ministry of Home Affairs and Local Autonomy College.

Some committee members wanted to organize the sixth edition around the problem of information technology, while others hoped to measure the impact of globalization on local government administration. After lengthy debate, committee members eventually reached a consensus. The majority believed that the next volume should be devoted to the issue of administrative reform, and also held that the new edition should deal with various reforms in reference to *local* governance. The editorial committee felt that, although government reform has become an international issue, previous studies had tended overwhelmingly to focus more on central government than on local public administration.

In the Asia and Pacific region, local government reform has become a key political issue in several states, of which Australia, Japan and Korea are leading examples. In these nations, the overhaul of local public management has been generating remarkable results, particularly in the context of center-local administrative configurations. Contributions to this volume of *Comparative Studies of Public Administration* clearly testify to the current state of affairs in these countries.

Korea, for instance, has made new overtures in local political development. Previously, government administration was strongly hierarchical. Local politicians and administrators tended to "look up" to Seoul for guidance and support, while national politicians "looked down" to local units of government. These traditional Korean postures persisted despite the advance of important decentralization measures in power, finance and structure. However, in the last several years, both the public and the elected members have increasingly come to appreciate the value of local governance. The process might accelerate as a result of the "crunch" in Korea's highly centralized system of economic management.

In this regard, Japan does not differ from Korea. The centralization of Japanese administration must also undergo substantial reform; in fact, decentralization has become a key national issue, regarded as one effective method of reinvigorating the country's economy in light of its poor performance over the past decade. The Australian experience seems to present a good lesson for both Japan and Korea. Highly

conscious of the impact of globalization on the country's public sector management, the Australian government has been implementing administrative reform on a national scale. Changing the format of inter-governmental relationships looms large as a priority in this attempt: local units of government in Australia must operate with their own resources and powers.

The current volume of *Comparative Studies of Public Administration* makes clear that decentralization and devolution of central powers has also become a critical issue in China, the Philippines, and Vietnam. However, these countries face an essentially different problem from the one in Australia, Japan, and Korea: these developing states must shrewdly balance centralization and decentralization. To consolidate the process of nation building, they need centralized government, which is critical to national economic and social growth. Concomitant with centralization, however, China, the Philippines, and Vietnam require decentralization because of the high demand for democratization in different regions of the countries. The contributors to this sixth edition delineate both the problem and the question of balance that these nations must resolve.

In addition to these examples from Asia and the Pacific, the current issue of *Comparative Studies of Public Administration* also features invited contributions from the United States, the United Kingdom, and the United Nations. The US and the UK have traditionally been leading models for viable local governance. Both Hrebendar and Peters have helped to broaden the perspective on government reform, and have added extra dimensions to the study of local public management. Their discourses provide useful lessons and important implications for the countries in the Asia and Pacific region. For example, Professor Peters details how, for a number of political reasons, the United Kingdom has tried to centralize local government administration. In contrast, Itoko Suzuki of the United Nations focuses on reforming local governance in Kenya. Using Nairobi as an example, this author outlines the recent struggle of the country to restore and improve good local governance. The African case study is highly educational and provides an important clue for the understanding of public sector reform in the Asia and Pacific region. Finally, Mehdi Darvish of the Islamic Republic of Iran lists both general and specific government reforms, and their impact on local governments, after outlining the context in which they were accomplished, and the methodology.

Not only are the articles in this sixth issue academically stimulating and professionally absorbing, they also have practical relevance. They will eventually help generate important dialogues among and between members of the Eastern Regional Organization for Public Administration. As the editor of this most recent volume of *Comparative Studies of Public Administration*, I wish to express my sincere appreciation for the understanding and cooperation I have received from all contributors, all staff members of the Local Autonomy College and the Ministry of Home Affairs of Japan.

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